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TAGS: [KPAO](#) [OPRC](#) [KMDR](#) [PREL](#)
SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION; ARREST OF FOREIGN OPERATIVES IN MIAMI;
12/14/07

1. SUMMARY STATEMENT

All local papers widely report that Argentine President Cristina Fernandez blasted as "garbage" allegations aired in a US court that four men accused of being Venezuelan agents had tried to smuggle \$800,000 into the country to finance her election campaign.

2. OPINION PIECES AND EDITORIALS

- "Queen's evidence"

Liberal, English-language "Buenos Aires Herald" editorializes (12/14) "President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner took 'shooting the messenger' up to the highest level yesterday when she accused the US of 'garbage' tactics in charging that the 800,000 dollars in Venezuelan businessman Guido Antonini Wilson's notorious suitcase impounded by Argentine Customs last August was in fact a donation for her campaign. She thus seems to be assuming that the US operates on the basis of the same degree of overlap between the government and the judiciary as Argentina... But if the move was indeed an attempt to pressure the new president against befriending Venezuela, it was improbably counterproductive ineptitude for a world superpower - since Cristina Fernandez was generally considered to have a far cozier attitude towards the US than her predecessor (and husband) Nestor Kirchner with the constant comparisons between herself and Hillary Clinton and with her excellent ties to the New York Jewish community, why antagonize her gratuitously? Insofar as the timing of the revelations can be suspected of being political..., it works out in the president's favor because airing this August scandal before she was safely elected and inaugurated would have been infinitely more damaging.

"In any case all this bluster about US conspiracies does not explain the still unanswered questions as to the destination of Antonini Wilson's suitcase - we must follow the money. The statement of a suspected Venezuelan agent cited by a US prosecutor in no way proves that the money was intended for Cristina Kirchner's campaign... - when the scandal first erupted last August, this newspaper was far more inclined to indicate pro-Chavez picket groups here as the intended beneficiaries than the government itself. But one thing is for sure - if the money was indeed earmarked for Cristina Kirchner, then it reached its intended destination because it is now in the hands of the state and the Kirchners have made it crystal-clear that they are the state.

"Over and above the truth about the suitcase, the Kirchner campaign massively abused state funds both at home and abroad - this (and the total lack of accountability whereby Venezuela and Argentina can give and receive vast sums of money) should be the real scandal."

- "An operation based on concrete deeds"

Ricardo Kirschbaum, general editor of leading "Clarín," writes (12/14) "The most important thing is getting to know whether Antonini Wilson acted as a double agent (who appeared as pro-Chavez while working for the USG) or whether he changed his mind in Miami and decided to cooperate with the FBI to unveil a network of Venezuelan spies.

"... The scandal affected Chavez but it affected Cristina Kirchner much more... The (Argentine) Government does not have much maneuvering margin with Chavez. It needs him as a last instance lender since it has resorted to him many times and has always found a generous and rapid response. This, in addition to other coincidences, keeps the Government close to the Venezuelan. Cristina was supposed to distance herself from Caracas more than her husband Nestor. The US could have wanted to affect this relationship. Cristina has reacted infuriated, but what will happen when her rage fades away remains to be seen...

"Now, Antonini Wilson's suitcase had money from PDVSA and it was earmarked, as it is said now, for Cristina's election campaign. If this was so, why wasn't the money sent through diplomatic pouch to avoid impertinent conclusions? Or was the money earmarked for some other purposes to be distributed here and in Uruguay?... The suitcase was impounded by the Argentine customs, but this is part of this novelesque and not naive intelligence operation that was made public at the most favorable political moment."

- "Washington emphasizes 'this is a judicial issue'"

Daily-of-record "La Nación" reports (12/14) "The US political power having influence in Latin America must have been aware of what lied ahead for days or even weeks. It must have walked on a very fine line between a too high peak of tension with the new administration of Cristina Kirchner and running the risk of wielding undue influence on investigators and justice.

"Sean McCormack, spokesperson of the US Department of State, told the media: 'We were aware of the case, but that was all our involvement, and I must underline, in the event I was not understood, that this is an operation of the US Department of Justice and the FBI.' 'This is not about US-Argentine relations; it has to do with the enforcement of US legislation in US territory.'

"Deputy Assistant Secretary for Western Hemisphere Affairs Thomas Shannon said yesterday that the suitcase scandal 'is a police case.' 'Our Department of Justice has an ongoing investigation against several individuals due to a violation of (US) law...'

"... Michael Shifter, VP, Inter-American Dialogue, explained that the re-emergence of the Antonini case 'could provide evidence that Chavez has been actively funding Latin American campaigns... and this could imply a significant change.'"

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